

**Hans von Trotha, *A Sentimental Journey: Laurence Sterne in Shandy Hall*. Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 2018. 144 pp. ISBN 978-3-8031-1332-0. €17.**

Don't be misled by the title: the first thing to say about this book is that it is in German. Its author, Hans von Trotha – Anglophile historian, journalist and novelist, formerly head of the venerable Nicolai Verlag in Berlin – will not be so well known to Sterneans, although his survey of *The English Garden* appeared in English translation in 2009.

The book under review is a handsome little hardback published by the SALTO imprint of (1960s firebrand turned respected Kafka specialist) Klaus Wagenbach. It is not a scholarly monograph and not for the specialist; instead it is a characterful introduction to Sterne's world and works, well written in a light, personal style and drawing heavily on biographical detail. The whole can be read in a sitting: in a dozen short chapters it weaves together Sterne's biography, personal and critical reflections from von Trotha, some history of the reception of Sterne's fictions (including German translations), and occasional additional voices. Von Trotha certainly knows his Sterne, and along the way there is some serious critical analysis: the book discusses characters, themes and techniques in Sterne's works, stressing their revolutionary novelty and formal innovation. Again in spite of its title, the book mainly focuses on *Tristram Shandy* rather than *A Sentimental Journey*, and pays quite some attention latterly to *The Journal to Eliza*. There is also a kind of plot: the "Sentimental Journey" of the title is von Trotha's, and the book is partly a travel narrative. It begins with a nice conceit, touring the National Portrait Gallery and establishing an eighteenth-century context by picking out Sterne's contemporaries before tarrying over the Reynolds portrait and Nollekens bust of Sterne himself. In Chapter 6 the author then takes the train to Yorkshire and follows in the coach tracks of Sterne returning to Shandy Hall from London in May 1760.

The book adopts some Sternean mannerisms, then, but not to an annoying extent. It quotes *in extenso* from Sterne's writings in Michael Walter's modern German translations, includes a number of standard illustrations taken from *Tristram Shandy* (the black page, Trim's flourish) and retells some of the well-known biographical anecdotes, such as the anatomy lesson with Sterne's cadaver. It covers many of the themes one would expect of an introductory text – Sterne's debt to Locke; the concept of sentimentality; digressivity as a narrative practice and Sterne's flamboyant punctuation; his influence on other writers, especially Jean Paul and Viktor Shklovsky; the Lorenzo cult – but also some non-standard angles. It spends a couple of perceptive pages (46-48) situating *Tristram Shandy* between Proust and Monty Python, for example, and another couple (97-99) developing a thought-provoking contrast between "aphoristic" (Sternean) and "epic" narration. There are recurrent references to the critical reception of Sterne by a small number of other writers (Walter Scott, Thackeray, Nietzsche, Virginia Woolf), and von Trotha also takes a fancy to a couple of earlier critical arguments. He devotes several pages to explaining Geoffrey Day's theory on the Sternean origins of "The Clockmaker's Outcry" (58-61) and several more (93-95) to the comparison Peter Conrad makes in his 1978 book *Shandyism* between the higgledy-piggledy structure of *Tristram Shandy* and Sir John Soane's House. A bonus is that the book also includes German translations of short new Sternean texts by Geoffrey Day ("Sterneanacollectionsmonomanie") and Patrick Wildgust ("Die erste Nacht in Shandy Hall" [The First Night in Shandy Hall]).

Occasional English words can be misspelt (e.g. "Georgean", "Jakobean" and "Elizabethian" on p. 11 alone), but the text is otherwise well presented. The image of Sterne that emerges is of a radically sentimentalising humorist, and this is supported by some nice observations such

as: “If one wanted to designate Laurence Sterne as the high priest of sentimentalism, then *Tristram Shandy* would be its Old Testament, *A Sentimental Journey* the New Testament and the *Journal to Eliza* the Apocrypha” (131). The book does not attempt to be comprehensive and is not a major contribution to scholarship, but nor is it intended to be: it makes a pleasing read and can be recommended as an amiable introduction to Sterne for German-speaking readers who are new to him and his world.

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